

Dabiq: IS's Apocalyptic 21st Century Jihadist Manifesto

Anthony N Celso*

Department of Security Studies and Criminal Justice, Angelo State University, USA

"They [Islamic State mujahidin] have a statement to make that will cause the world to hear and understand the meaning of terrorism, and boots that will trample the idol of nationalism, destroy the idol of democracy and uncover its deviant nature." Dabiq Issue 1 "Return of the Khalifah" [1]

Islamic State Tactical Rationality and its Millenarian Ideology

The rise of the Islamic State (IS) and its rapid conquest of a third of Iraq and Syria are truly astounding. The group's June 2014 announcement of an Iraqi-Syrian caliphate breaks colonial era borders and its success is unprecedented in the history of modern jihadist movements. Islamic State publications and videos celebrate its termination of the Sykes-Picot accord [2]. With its transnational state, IS achieves a goal that has bedeviled past Islamist insurgencies.

Despite formidable adversaries including fellow jihadists, IS has beaten them by resorting to brutal asymmetric and conventional warfare. The Iraqi and Syrian Government have failed to stop them. Opposing jihadists and rebel forces in Syria have persistently lost territory before their rapid advance.

Analysis of the Islamic State indicates that the group has a professional military organization and its operations are carefully planned and well financed [3]. IS has a reputation for meticulous reporting of its battlefield attacks whose veracity has been verified by independent analysis [4]. The terror organization's strategy aspires to occupy territory along the Tigris and Euphrates River Basins controlling key resources (water, oil, food). Dams, oil wells and grain storage bins are particularly coveted by the group. No terror organization has been so forthright in the reporting of its strategy or aims. It has pursued its warfare and economic strategy in a rational and persistent manner.

IS envisions a permanent transnational jihadist state in the heart of the Middle East. Since its April 2013 formation, IS has succeeded in developing a rudimentary state in Raqqa, Syria that serves as a model to govern Iraq. IS' Sharia courts dispense justice ruthlessly, their dawa outreach councils includes educational and community services and IS social media presents its ideas in a technologically sophisticated manner [5]. It actively courts tribal engagement and has pragmatically aligned with former adversaries.

The Islamic State's military capability and logical strategy lead many analysts to conclude that IS is a rational actor driven by political and economic imperatives. A recent POMEPS Study on IS in Iraq sees IS' sectarian and ethnic brutality as selective, strategic and instrumental [6]. One of their analysts discounts the organization's claims of executing over 1,700 Shi'ite Iraqi army prisoners outside Mosul [7]. Underscoring the view that IS is a rational political actor, is its pragmatic alliance with ideologically antagonistic Sunni groups, including some tribes that aligned with US forces against its Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) progenitor.

Viewing IS as a rational political actor is mistaken for it confuses the group's instrumental rationality with a logical long-term vision. IS' tactical brilliance masks an ideology that is driven by *prophetic* imperatives clearly documented in its own literature. Given its accurate

reporting it is imperative to look at IS' ideological message. The Islamic State's stated ideology is not propaganda or cynical manipulation but a sincere statement of its beliefs anchored in the "prophetic" method.

The intent of this essay is to discuss the group's apocalyptic, sectarian and fanatical world view. Ideological extremism has been a fatal weakness that has plagued past jihadist movements like the Algerian Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and IS's Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) precursor. Both groups floundered as their excesses invited popular revulsion and internal divisions. This essay analyzes IS's world view as expressed in its e-publications *Reports on the Islamic State* (Issues 1-4) and *Dabiq Magazine* (Issue 1 and 2) [8].

The Islamic State's publications espouse an apocalyptic, takfiri, sectarian and a salafist world view that builds upon the strategy of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's AQI. Its millenarian philosophy is openly expressed in *Dabiq* magazine and its *Reports on the Islamic State* precursor. *Dabiq* borrows heavily from Al Qaeda (AQ) ideologues Abu Musab al-Suri, Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi frequently presenting their ideas as Zarqawi's whose battlefield strategy and state-building project is venerated in *Dabiq* [9].

The magazine's endorsement of Zarqawi's vision is buttressed by Qur'anic verses and hadith. *Dabiq's* citation of religious texts and traditions is considered authentic and rigorous. The hadiths chosen come from reputable authority [10]. *Dabiq* in particular is used by the IS to attract recruits, frighten opponents, and discredit jihadist rivals. Above all *Dabiq* present the IS and its leader Caliph Ibrahim as the conduit to realize hadith based prophecy of inevitable Islamic global conquest.

An Apocalyptic Neo-Zarqawist World View

The Islamic State's ideology combines millennial, takfiri, salafi and sectarian components in a powerful jihadist narrative of Islamic regression, exploitation, ultimate redemption, and triumph. It is a Manichean world view that separates the world in two camps. *Dabiq* states the world is divided:

"... between the camp of the kufr (disbelief) and hypocrisy and the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin and the camp of the Jews, crusaders, their allies and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews" [11].

The rise of the IS and its construction of the caliphate is presented

*Corresponding author: Anthony N Celso, Department of Security Studies and Criminal Justice, Angelo state university, USA, Tel: (610) 388-9214; E-mail: anthony.celso@angelo.edu

Received October 20, 2014; Accepted October 21, 2014; Published November 04, 2014

Citation: Celso AN (2014) Dabiq: IS's Apocalyptic 21st Century Jihadist Manifesto. J Pol Sci Pub Aff 2: e111. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.1000e111

Copyright: © 2014 Celso AN. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

by Dabiq as a transcendental step marking the “end times” and the inevitable destruction of the apostate and crusader forces. Under its apocalyptic narrative Caliph Ibrahim is subliminally portrayed as a modern day Mahdi. Dabiq frequently evokes mystical and prophetic elements for it is named after a northern Syrian site of a prophesied battle where Islamic forces annihilate their crusader adversaries. Outside of Aleppo Dabiq has fallen to IS brigades.

IS' occupation of Dabiq could be seen by their militants as a historic step to invite Armageddon. The utilization of prophetic hadith epitomizes IS' belief in divine forces that belie its tactical rationality. Dabiq' evocation of prophetic imagery is a predominant religious motif and a key component in its social media outreach to young jihadists. Many IS fighters are motivated by apocalyptic themes. Jihadist social media is keenly interested in the “prophetic method” and the advent of the end times [12]. Their Iraqi Shia, Hezbollah and Syrian Alawi antagonists are similarly energized by the chance to fight Sunni takfirists as a divine “end times” imperative. In its utilization of logical strategy to implement a barbaric and utopian project, IS travels the path of the Nazis, Khmer Rouge, Hutu elites and Serbian militias whose operational rationality are frequently forgotten.

The Islamic State's brutal trajectory meticulously follows the strategy established by its progenitor Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Killed by U.S. forces in 2006 the “martyred” Jordanian jihadist emerges in IS publications as a cult hero, whose exploits, ideology and warfare strategy are venerated. IS's leader Caliph Ibrahim and the victories of IS militants are presented as the realization of Zarqawi's ambitious plan to construct a Mideast Sunni jihadist state. Dabiq reifies his memory and Zarqawi serves as the organizations inspiration for its takfiri and sectarian violence.

Borrowed from a Zarqawi address, the magazine's introductory passage “*The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify-by Allah's permission-until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq*” sanctifies Zarqawi's contribution to IS' “prophetic method of jihad”. Zarqawi mythic status eclipses Usama bin Laden's for IS militants for the late Saudi leader is never mentioned in Dabiq. Caliph Ibrahim's July 4, 2014 Mosul address is depicted in apocalyptic terms by Dabiq and it squares with Zarqawi's salafist and takfiri world view.

Dabiq's frequently attributes ideas developed by al-Qaeda's main ideologues ideas and IS critics to Zarqawi. The magazine endorses Abu Bakr Naji's strategy outline in his e-book *The Management of Savagery* as Zarqawi's “plan”. Dabiq sketches a series of steps: hijrah (emigration), jamaah (unity), destabilize taghut (apostate state), tamkin (unity) and Khilafah (caliphate) contained in Naji's book by juxtaposing this sequence with the actions of Zarqawi and his ISI/ISIL/IS successors [13].

Naji's book argues that Islamic insurgency progresses from localized insurrection to a broader mujahidin movement [14]. Analogous to Che's Guevara's “el foco” concept, Naji advocates insurgents develop rural rebellions where government forces are weak and establish Sharia rule. Once popular support is gathered, mujahidin use their rural safe havens to build armed capacity to weaken Muslim apostate governments until they collapse. Given that Naji predicts that Islamist insurgency will be worldwide, victorious mujahidin will eventually unite into a caliphate to conquer the globe.

Within this context, Dabiq presents Zarqawi as a divinely sanctioned political leader and religious authority. By juxtaposing hadith and Qur'anic citations with Zarqawi's battlefield tactics, speeches and martyrdom, Dabiq endorses his efforts to consolidate

mujahidin under one organization. Comparing the Prophet's life with Zarqawi and Baghdadi's exploits, the Islamic State hopes to establish a divine lineage proving that IS is Allah's chosen vehicle to liberate the Muslim world.

Caliph Ibrahim's July 4, 2014 Mosul address is accordingly presented as a key historic event ushering forth Islam's resurrection. Embracing a “prophetic method”, the Islamic State's caliphate is portrayed as the Muslim world's purifier of apostasy and avenger of Crusader injustice. Islamic state calls for hijra or emigration of all Muslims to the caliphate and demands their complete loyalty. Islamic State Report No. 4 confidently states:

“It was only a matter of time before the oppressive tawaghit would begin to fall one by one to the swords of the mujahidin who would raise the banner of tawid, restore hukm of Allah, direct the masses back to the *prophetic method of jihad* and away from the corruption of democracy and nationalism and unite them under one imam [15].”

Salafist and Takfiri Rejection of Shi'ite and Sunni Revisionist Apostasy

The Islamic State's sectarian and takfiri strategy follows Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's 2004 letter to Al Qaeda Central. Intercepted by U.S. authorities, the letter argues that Shi'ites are “confirmed polytheists [16]”. The Jordanian viewed Shi'ites and Kurds in Iraq as enablers of a diabolical Jewish-Crusader conspiracy to persecute Sunnis and to establish an Iraqi Zionist state after the 2003 U.S. invasion. Zarqawi's hatred toward the Shi'ites meshed with his plans to construct a Sunni jihadist state. Hoping to invite sectarian civil war, state collapse and U.S. withdraw, AQI brutally targeted Shi'ite civil and religious institutions and ceremonies killing thousands. Forming an Islamic emirate in 2006 Zarqawi's successors rebranded AQI as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and they have fanatically carried forth his sectarian vision. Baghdadi, who assumed the leadership of ISI in 2010, has amplified Zarqawi's vision by extending ISI operations into Syria to fight the apostate Assad regime and its Hezbollah allies.

Islamic State publications critiques Shi'ite and Kurdish apostasy and celebrates their killing by the “lions” of the Islamic State. It depicts a Muslim world plagued by shirk [polytheism] with pious Sunnis repressed by Shi'ite and Alawite tyrannical leaders [tawaghit] and their Zionist-Crusader masters. Based on Qur'anic verses and hadith Dabiq's first issue *The Return of the Khilafah* sees the Islamic State as Allah's prophesied vanguard to rejuvenate Islam by restoring tawid [unity], purging it of apostasy [shirk] and fortifying the true ummah [community] by integrating political and religious authority under caliph Ibrahim. The fourth edition of *Report on the Islamic State* celebrates the slaughter of 1,700 Shi'ite army prisoners after the June 2014 fall of Mosul. IS' militants proudly stand by mass graves in the edition's many photos of slaughter. Not since Japanese army atrocities in rape of Nanking has an organization so publicly celebrated mass death.

The Islamic State uses *takfir* (e.g., excommunication of co-religionists) to legitimate killing Muslims. Traditionally *takfir* had been confined to excommunicate impious rulers and immoral individuals. Jihadist clerics, however, have progressively expanded its use by collectivizing *takfir* ex-communicating large numbers of Muslims [17]. *Takfir* had been applied to civilian supporters of impious states, regime soldiers and to religious minorities like Shi'ites and Alawites, considered poly-theists by Sunni militants because of their reverence for the Prophet Ali and his son Husayn [18].

Syrian medieval scholar Ibn Tamiyya ruling that Shi'ites's are *apostates* has a powerful legitimating force for Sunni jihadists [19]. Recalling past Shia revolts against Sunni authority, Taymiyya viewed them as anti-Islamic and he actively called for killing their leaders. In a maximalist interpretation of Taymiyya's ruling Zarqawi applied it to the Shi'ite population and extended it to the Kurds whose brand of Sunni Islam he viewed as infected by communist and secular influences. Like Zarqawi, Caliph Ibrahim has little regard for Christian and Yazidi *infidels* whose ritualistic slaughter by IS militants is revered in the organization's media outlets. Notoriously the Islamic State's conquest of north Iraq has been associated with the mass expulsion and massacres of Christian and Yazidi population's.

IS militants are similarly merciless with Sunni apostate regimes and their supporters. Dabiq borrows from Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood theorist Sayyid Qutb whose memory and martyrdom is revered among jihadists. Jihadists historically have justified their war against Muslim *apostate* regimes by arguing that they are in a state of ignorance of divine truth or *jahiliyyah* because their accretion of foreign influences over time made them deviate from the Qur'an [20]. Sayyid Qutb argued that *jahiliyyah* could be transformed by elites knowledgeable of true Islamic principles. This jihadist vanguard could enlighten the masses purging them of *apostasy* leading to a popular rebellion against *impious* leaders. Only after the imposition of sharia and the fortification of the ummah can the regression of Islamic society be reversed.

Dabiq endorses the leadership concept of the imamah (combined political and religious authority) characteristic of early Islamic development. The separation of religious and political authority imposed by apostate leaders and heretically consecrated by the traditional ulema (clergy) is a persistent Dabiq theme. Dabiq borrows this view from Zarqawi's intellectual mentor Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi who justified Islamic rebellion against apostate regimes and their clerical supporters as a divinely sanctioned obligation [21]. Employing the analogy of a cloth whose threads have weakened over time, Dabiq decries the unraveling of the threads of Islamic purity under the relentless assault of apostate forces.

Within this framework IS' construction of the caliphate fortifies the underlying roots of genuine Islamic society by purging apostasy and restoring the ummah's unity. Operating from its headquarters in Raqqa, IS has attempted to recreate a modern version of Muhammad's Medina community. The *Institute for the Study of War* indicates that IS' governance of the north Syrian town has resulted in the development of rudimentary state capacity [22]. IS Sharia councils have developed legal frameworks where Islamic law and rituals are brutally enforced by religious police. Beheadings, amputations, stoning and crucifixions of criminals and opponents are common. Religious minorities are brutally repressed and their shrines and temples are desecrated.

The group's dawa outreach has resulted in the provision of education, the distribution of food, and welfare services. While IS has sought to coopt local elites and has developed councils to engage tribal federations, groups who oppose them are massacred. IS militants in Raqqa Province killed over 700 members of the al-She'tat tribe who rebelled against them. IS's consolidation of its Raqqa redoubt has come at the expense of rebel forces including fellow jihadists and was the basis of its predecessor The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) February 2014 expulsion from Al Qaeda.

ISIL's violent predatory activities against other jihadist groups and its failure to abide by Al Qaeda's decree that it confine its armed struggle to Iraq, forced Ayman al-Zawahiri to expel the organization [23]. Since the rupture, thousands of jihadists have died as IS militants

continue to attack against other rebel forces [24]. Despite appeals by Al Qaeda Central and rival jihadist organizations for IS to submit to Shura council mediation, Islamic State units have continued their attacks gaining more territory. As IS continues to progress on the Iraqi and Syrian battlefields, rival jihadist organizations like Al Qaeda's official affiliate al-Nusra have witnessed defections to Baghdadi's organizations.

IS' June 2014 declaration of a caliphate has been pilloried by Al Qaeda's chief ideologues Abu Qatada and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi for its failure to consult with other jihadi organization prior to its formation. Similarly leading clerics have attacked IS for its widespread use of takfir, its sectarianism and slaughter of fellow Muslims. Unfazed IS has gotten some clerical support and its military success has earned it acclaim in jihadi social media and has augmented its recruitment of foreign fighters. In July 2014 alone IS recruited over 6,000 jihadists in Syria. The Islamic State's "end times" apocalyptic discourse and its promise of a caliphate continues to dazzle young jihadists further weakening Al Qaeda.

The open warfare between IS and Al Qaeda continues the struggle Zarqawi had with AQ emir Ayman al-Zawahiri during the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Between 2004 and 2005 their exchange of letters indicated a dispute over Zarqawi's sectarian and takfiri agenda that Zawahiri heatedly rejected [25]. Undeterred AQI's successors have remained faithful and expanded Zarqawi's vision. IS's second edition of Dabiq *The Flood* criticizes fellow jihadists organizations including al-Nusra leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani for refusing to accept its caliphate proclamations [26].

Likening their rivals to those who rejected Noah prophecy, IS offers its ideological antagonists a stark choice between destruction and repentance. IS view's itself as Allah's catalyst to bring forth prophetic events and challenges its opponents to theological duel known as the *mubalahah* where divine intercession resolves disputes by favoring the righteous and punishing the wicked. Within this context, IS success against al-Nusra and the Islamic Front in Syria is seen as Allah's blessing. Those who refuse to join the IS Dabiq argues will face inevitable destruction.

Conclusion: Tactical Rationality in the Service of a Utopian Project

The proposition that terrorism is a rational is widely accepted [27]. Yet this explanation appears poorly suited to account for theologically driven terror organizations. Recently theories that all terror networks are rational have come under vigorous attack [28]. Islamist takfiri terrorism and millenarian violence it inspires seems particularly resistant to rational explanation [29].

The traditional preference to analyze Islamist groups from a rational perspective may be misplaced. Numerous authors have critiqued rational analytical models and their applicability to Islamist terrorism. Paul Berman, for example, critiques the rational paradigm for failing to account for the theological imperatives that dominate Islamist groups [30]. Based on the studies of secular terror groups, Robert Nalbandov argues that rational perspectives are poorly designed to analyze Islamic terrorism [31]. While these groups are very capable of short-term operational rationality, their long-range objectives are utopian and unachievable. Jihadism may be a unique form of terrorism with distinct cycles of activity driven by belief in mystical "prophetic" forces [32].

This is especially true for Islamist millenarian groups like the Islamic State that firmly believes that they are a catalyst for divine

will. IS rationally crafted war strategy, its slick media campaigns, its acquisition of key resources should not mask its utopian ideological thrust. So far opponents have failed to reverse IS' state project. Working with Kurdish militias and Iraqi special forces, American air strikes have at best contained IS's expansion in Northern Iraq.

The apocalyptic ideology of Caliph Ibrahim incipient state building project leaves policy makers with few options. Undeterred by threats or the scale of the enemies it faces, IS seeks violent confrontation with all states and groups opposed to its fanatical and barbarous vision. Waiting for IS to implode is very risky strategy underscored by the group's brutal crushing of opposing tribes and the failure of its divided enemies to coordinate offensive ability. With its petroleum resources, ample cash reserves and criminal operations, cutting external finances will have little effect. The Islamic State cannot be contained or engaged. With its maximalist millenarian agenda, IS must be militarily confronted and destroyed.

References

1. Dabiq (2014) The Return of the Khilafah. Dabiq Issue 1 al-Hayat Media Center.
2. Smashing the Borders of the Tawaghit (2014) Islamic State Report 4 Alhayat Media Center.
3. Alex B (2014) ISIS Annual Reports Indicate Metrics Driven Military Command Institute for the Study of War Backgrounder.
4. Ibid.
5. Charles CC, Samuel R (2014) ISIS Governance in Syria" Middle East Security Report 22 July 2014 The Institute for the Study of War.
6. POMEPS Briefing (2014) Iraq between Maliki and the Islamic State.
7. Stathis NK (2014)The logic of violence in the Islamic State's war" in "Iraq between Maliki and the Islamic State. POMEPS Briefing.
8. Dabiq (2014) 1-2/Islamic State Reports 1-4.
9. Michael WSR (2014) From Theory to Action: The Rationale behind the Re-establishment of the Caliphate" in Terrorism Monitor 12: 158-161.
10. Harleen KG (2014) Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State" Backgrounder. The Institute for the Study of War.
11. The Return of the Khilafah (2008) Dabiq First Edition al-Hayat Media Center.
12. Aron Zelin and Philip Smyth (2014) The Vocabulary of Sectarianism. The Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy.
13. Michael W.S. Ryan (2014) Dabiq: What the Islamic State's New Magazin3e Tells us about Their Strategic Direction. Recruitment Patterns and Guerilla Doctrine. Jamestown Terrorism Monitor.
14. Abu Bakr Naji (2004) Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage through which the Ummah.
15. Smashing the Borders of the Tawaghit (2013), ibid page 3.
16. Letter signed by Zarqawi (2004) "Reprinted in Jean-Charles Brisard, Zarqawi: The New Face of Al Qaeda (Other Press: New York, 2005). The Zawahiri Letter and Strategy of Al Qaeda".
17. Mohammad M Hafez (2010) "Tactics, Takfir and Anti-Muslim Violence" in Assaf Moghadan and Brian Fishman (editors) Self-inflicted Wounds: Debates and Division in Al Qaeda and its Periphery.
18. Nibras K (2010) Syria through Jihadist Eyes (Hoover Institute: Stanford).
19. Ibid.
20. John C (2010) Sayyid Qub and the Roots of Radical Islam.
21. Nibras K (2009) "A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi upstages Maqdsi" International Institute of Jihadi Websites Monitoring Report.
22. Charles C Caris, Samuel Reynolds, ibid.
23. Thomas J (2014a) "Al Qaeda General Command Disowns Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham" Long War.
24. Syria (2014) The Long War.
25. Letter signed by Zarqawi (2004) reprinted in Jean-Charles Brisard, Zarqawi: The New Face of Al Qaeda.
26. Robert N (2013)" The Flood" Dabiq.
27. Jack Gibbs (2012) "Conceptualization of Terrorism" in John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, Terrorism Studies a Reader Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism". Terrorism Studies A Reader; Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism" in John Horgan and Kurt Braddock editors, Terrorism Studies: A Reader.
28. Robert N (2013) Irrational Rationality of Terrorism. Journal of Strategic Security 6: 92-102.
29. Bruce Hoffman (2012) Inside Terrorism. David Rappaport, "1 Fear and trembling: Terrorism in the three religious traditions". Terrorism Studies A Reader.
30. Paul Berman (2003) Terror and Liberalism.
31. Nalbandov, ibid.
32. Anthony Celso (2014) Cycles of Jihadist Movements and the Role of Irrationality. Orbis 58: 229-247.